

**Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus
Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
Markup of S. 611
October 28, 2015**

The Committee will come to order and the Chair recognizes himself for an opening statement.

Today we markup S. 611, the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act. S. 611 passed the Senate unanimously. The House version H.R. 2853, was introduced by our Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, and the Vice-Chairman of the Subcommittee, Mr. Harper. I congratulate and thank them for their bipartisan work on it.

Safe Drinking Water Act, regulations issued by EPA present technical, managerial, and physical challenges beyond the capacity of these towns to afford on the same scale as urban centers.

Residents of these communities work hard to support their families and their local governments, but often earning wages below those of their counterparts in the more urbanized areas yet their per-customer compliance costs are far higher than in many larger communities. Sometimes, it's just a matter of having the ability to keep up with the red-tape.

The bill before us reauthorizes the EPA's program providing technical assistance to small public water systems. S. 611 maintains the existing statutory authorization of \$15 million annually (including 3 percent for technical assistance to public water systems owned or operated by Indian Tribes), but extends authorization through fiscal year 2020.

S. 611 also authorizes EPA to provide technical assistance programs to small public water systems through grants or cooperative agreements made to non-profit organizations. The bill requires preference in awarding grants to non-profits that are most qualified and experienced and that small water systems find most beneficial and effective – a feature we heard about during our February hearing and again last week.

Moving this bill without amendment is important. While the House Appropriations Committee has not provided small water system technical assistance funding for fiscal year 2016, that Committee has left open the option that it would re-evaluate funding for this matter as part of a later annual spending bill if Congress enacts a fresh authorization.

People who live in rural communities deserve every bit of water quality and technical resources that folks who live in densely populated urban centers do.

I urge support for S. 611.

I reserve the balance of my time and yield to Mr. Tonko for an opening statement.